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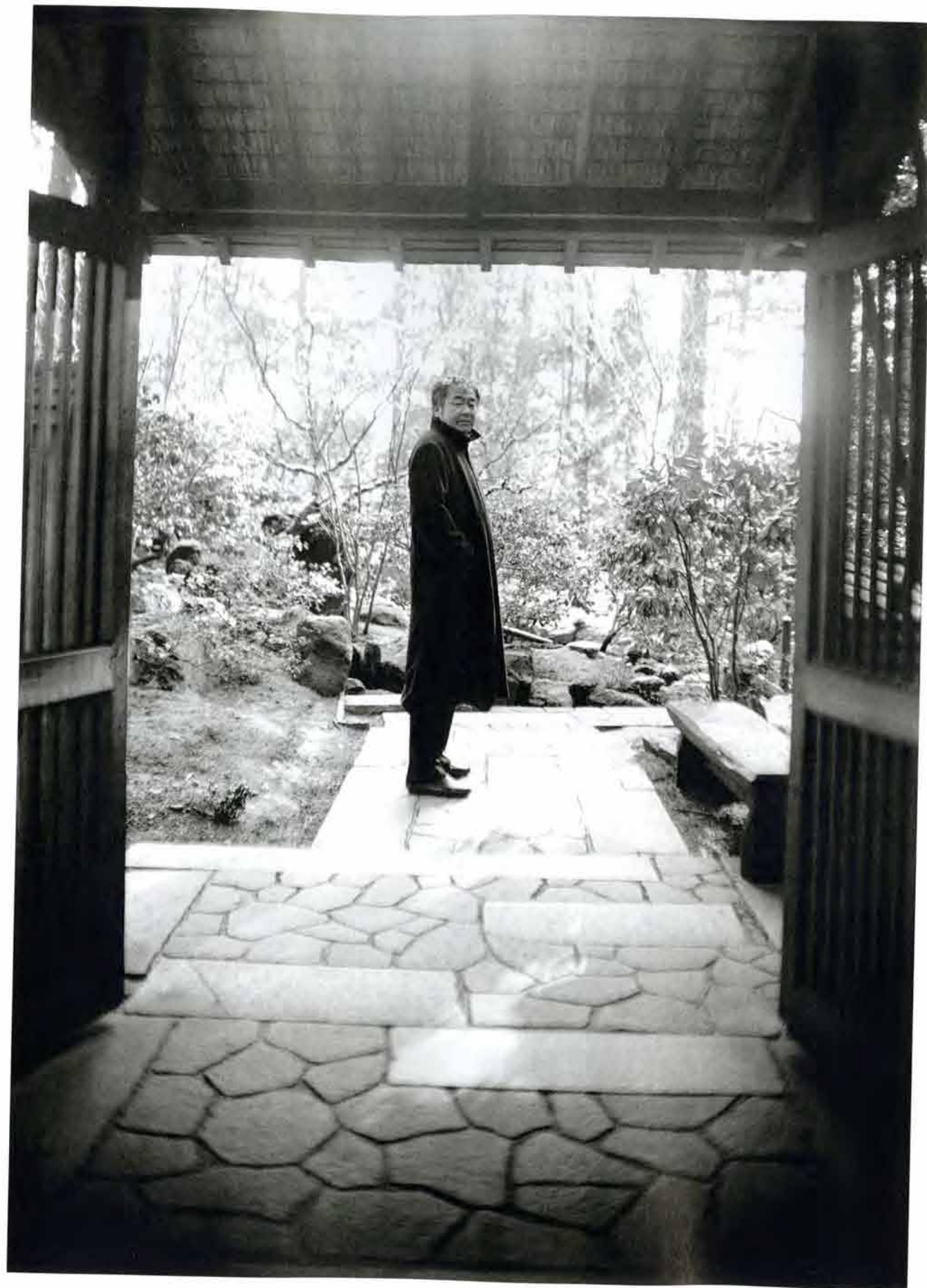
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PHOTOGRAPH BY CARLIN SUNDELL

LONG STORY [SHORT]

Kengo Kuma, 56

# THE ARCHITECT

Designed in five phases between 1963 and 1990, the Portland Japanese Garden has become an international destination renowned for its fealty to tradition. But by hiring Kengo Kuma for the next major expansion, the garden is aiming to stretch the boundaries of design, both here and in Japan. Known for his fusion of ancient Japanese aesthetics with leading technologies and materials, Kuma's firm has designed such prestigious buildings as the Hiroshige Museum of Art in Japan and the Great (Bamboo) Wall house in Beijing. Here, Kuma *san* reflects on Japanese garden design and its meaning in light of the recent earthquake.

AS TOLD TO RANDY GRAGG

**I HAVE BEEN TO JAPANESE GARDENS** outside Japan, but, in my impression, they are Japanese in name only. The garden here is really beautiful because of the wetness and the big trees, and the topography is unique. Most Japanese gardens are very flat. The design here very smartly uses the different levels for different garden styles: the sand and stone garden, the natural garden, the strolling pond garden. Each is an entirely different experience.

**THE HUMIDITY OF PORTLAND LIGHT** is similar to Japan's. In Japanese painting, we do not need to use perspective. Instead, we use "super-juxtaposition"—because of the wetness, things that are far away are ambiguous. You can feel the layers. The architecture is related: we use screens to filter natural light to create the same kind of ambiguous space.

**MY FATHER LIKED** architectural design very much. He collected things from great designers like Bruno Taut. The Japanese house can grow very easily. Every three or four years, we did an expansion. Before each one we had a meeting. It was a kind of "design competition" about the planning, the interior, and the arrangement of the furniture. My father was very democratic in wanting to hear every opinion. It was good training to be an architect.

**IN THE 20TH CENTURY**, modern architecture and Japanese gardens were of different worlds. The gardens are like the tea ceremony—very conservative. The historical,

political influence from America in the 20th century was too shocking to the Japanese. It was a kind of trauma. Modern architects like Arata Isozaki, Kenzo Tange, Fumihiko Maki, they hate traditional Japanese design. I believe I can respect both tradition and the modern.

**THE PEOPLE OF JAPAN** have been hit with three simultaneous challenges: earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster. Although the spirit of the people has thus far been stoic if not resilient, it has been battered. Continuing the expansion of the Portland Japanese Garden is a generous gesture of support and strength—an anchoring signal on the other side of the Pacific. Allowing it to falter would have a correspondingly undesirable meaning.

**THE CHARACTER OF PORTLAND** is compactness. The walking experience of the city is very attractive. For the garden expansion, we want to keep the feeling of human scale. Portland's garden is very isolated. The entrance is very sudden. In every Japanese space, the approach is very important—it is a spiritual journey.

**THIS IS A SMALL PROJECT FOR ME**, but it is an important cultural exchange. The Japanese pavilion at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 in Chicago was typical, but Frank Lloyd Wright saw it and was so impressed, it became the trigger of a new style. If I can do something similar, then we can have some *new* Frank Lloyd Wright (*laughs*) and stimulate American architecture. ☼